



photo courtesy of the Wild Salmon Center

High school students from Russia and Oregon recently participated in the first international Salmon Stewardship Summit as part of a week-long environmental exchange camp.

Saving Salmon

From *Russia* With Love

Twelve students from Oregon and twelve students from Sakhalin Island, Russia came together to engage in scientific inquiry, cultural analysis and international discussion as it relates to the natural world around them. The two organizations leading this effort – The Freshwater Trust and the Wild Salmon Center – hope that the summit will help foster the next generation of environmental leaders.

“The summit is designed to instill a deeper appreciation and understanding of the value of native wild fish and watershed conservation so that we develop future environmental stewards,” said Sarah Oakley, education manager with The Freshwater Trust.

The summit kicked off with a tour of Portland. For two and a half days, the Oregon students guided the Russian students around Portland. They had a team scavenger hunt, a tour of the World Forestry Center and a visit to the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry. The students also visited community-led restoration sites at the Johnson Creek Watershed where they began an exploration into water stewardship.

Since both Oregon and Sakhalin Island have deep cultural ties to salmon, opening night of the residential camp centered on cultural connections to salmon. A Warm Springs elder in full dress led a traditional salmon roast and first-foods ceremony.

“Tonight’s ceremony really demonstrated the shared heritage of salmon found between Oregon and Russia’s Sakhalin Island,” said Oakley. “Being in the forest on the banks of the Salmon River really helped deliver that message.”

The next day, students divided into small teams and focused on four aquatic research techniques: riparian vegetation, water quality, salmon biology and the diversity of macroinvertebrates. Students donned wading boots and explored the rocks for bugs, tested the pH and temperature of the water, learned about the biology and life cycle of salmon, and ventured through the trees and plants around the river to understand their role in freshwater health.

“Getting outside has gotten me excited about science,” explained student Wyatt Phillipi. “It’s more hands-on than listening to my teacher in the lab.”

These initial investigations into river ecology helped each team develop their Science Inquiry Project, a research project designed to shed light on the Salmon River side channels’ roles in salmon survival. For the next three days, students spent afternoons conducting scientific research and learning from experts from the Mt. Hood Forest Service, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Sandy River Basin Watershed Council.

Students shared their conclusions and experiences at a closing dinner, “From Treetops to Laptops.” In front of friends and family, the teams not only demonstrated the science behind freshwater health, but also the cultural connection – both with salmon and with each other – they made during the week.

And although the Science Inquiry Projects were the main focus of the exchange camp, students also experienced other outdoor adventures. They taught each other archery and orienteering, hiked to the Wildwood Recreation Center, swam and participated in team-building activities. By the end of the program had had exchanged “priviet” with “hello” and “macroinvertebrate” with “vezpozvonochniki.”

The Freshwater Trust and the Wild Salmon Center hope to hold a similar summit next summer in Sakhalin Island.